

# SETTING A CONSCIOUS TABLE

FOUR QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU PREPARE A PASSOVER SEDER

As you prepare for the Passover seder this year, please consider using these four questions to help inform your own conscious food choices, and to enhance your discussions with family and friends during the holiday:

## 1 How might the tradition of a *korban pesach* inform our food choices today?

Animal agriculture in a contemporary setting is highly consolidated and centralized. Most animals, including those raised for kosher products, live in extreme confinement in unsustainable densities, and suffer high rates of injury, disease, and severe mental distress. Today, most Jews live in urban settings, and we rarely if ever meet the animals we eat during their lifetimes.

During Maggid, we recall that the Passover feast is based on the tradition of a *korban pesach*—an offering of a lamb to God because “God passed over [*pasach*] the houses of our ancestors, sparing them, when God struck the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:27). The word *korban* might usually be translated as “sacrifice,” but its root (K-R-V) means to draw close [to God]. In the biblical narrative (Exodus 12:6), God actually issues a commandment that on the 10th of Nissan the Israelites should watch over their lamb until the 14th, the day of slaughter.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- A. What would the experience of seder feasting feel like if one were to spend the previous days closely and carefully tending to the animal before eating it?
- B. Knowing how most animals are raised for food today, how might you apply the idea of “drawing close” spiritually— and paying close attention to the food you eat—to your meals during the holiday and beyond?

## 2 How can we prevent ignorant participation in systemic violence toward other beings?

Today, the welfare of humans is also wrapped up in the fate of animals raised and killed for food: most laborers who work in factory farms and slaughterhouses are vulnerable immigrants, people of color, and poor. Commercial fishing and poultry plant workers in particular have some of the most dangerous jobs in the country. Few of us interact with or bear witness to this web of violence.

Even more than at any other sacrificial ceremony, participants in the *korban pesach* demonstrated that their animal consumption was part of a web of violence: the sequence of events in the Exodus narrative include the death of the first born and painting the lamb’s blood on their doorposts to protect themselves from the bloodshed in Egypt (Exodus 12:7).



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- A. How does industrial animal agriculture either separate consumers from or draw them into a web of violence?
- B. How might you protect those who are most vulnerable to systemic violence today, and preserve your sensitivity toward abuse and suffering?

## 3 What role can our seders play in mitigating the climate crisis?

Animal agriculture is a leading cause of climate change, if not the leading cause of climate change. Farmed animals are raised in unsustainable ways that increasingly threaten the health of people, wildlife, and our shared planetary ecosystems. About 80 percent of deforestation occurs to clear land for crops for livestock and grazing, which exacerbates human-caused climate warming and the increased severity of droughts, fires, hurricanes, and flooding. These phenomena can occur sequentially, making it even harder for land, people, and whole living communities to recover.

*Mitzrayim*, Egypt, had become a “narrow place” where the dominant people in power oppressed others to extract as many resources from their land as possible. Pharaoh commanded the building of storehouses to stockpile grain, and slowly exploited the land and the people of Israel until they were slaves. Similar to a cascade of related disasters caused by climate change (drought followed by fires followed by mudslides), some hypothesize that the 10 plagues had a basis in natural phenomena.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- A. How do meat and dairy consumption directly and indirectly contribute to deforestation and climate change?
- B. As the Freedom from Egypt happened in stages, what would be the four stages or actions you might consider to mitigate your impact on the environment through food choices, starting with your seder?

## 4 How might you help restore wholeness to the world this Passover?



**Go Plant-based:** Use plant-based foods to represent the shank bone and egg on your seder plate, such as a cooked beet, an eggplant, and other alternatives.



**Buy Higher Welfare:** If you do serve meat or eggs, buy “less and better” and support farmers working to raise animals outside the factory farm system. Visit JIFA ([jewishinitiativeforanimals.org/jlc](http://jewishinitiativeforanimals.org/jlc)) and Hazon (<https://hazon.org/better-eggs>) for recommendations on purchasing higher welfare eggs and kosher meat.



**Content Enrichment:** Integrate an ancient ecological foundation of Passover and other contemporary ethical challenges into your seder conversation with haggadot and supplements that inspire new questions and action.

Check out:

- The Egg on the Seder Plate, a haggadah supplement created by JIFA & Hazon  
<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/egg-seder-plate>
- The Promise of the Land, a Passover Haggadah by Rabbi Ellen Bernstein  
<https://www.thepromiseoftheland.com/>



**Hungry for More?** You can make a significant impact for animals, people, and the planet by improving the food practices within your Jewish community during Passover and year-round. Visit [jewishinitiativeforanimals.org/jlc](http://jewishinitiativeforanimals.org/jlc) and [hazon.org](http://hazon.org) for more information.